

Costa Calls on Salazar to Ease Restrictions

“The system is broken, period.”

Washington, D.C. – Today, Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno) announced that the Interior Department is forecasting an increased federal water supply allocation for south of the Delta agricultural contractors.

In its 2011 Federal Water Allocation Outlook, the Interior Department forecasts a water allocation of 50 percent.

After learning of the announcement, Costa delivered a letter to Interior Department Secretary Ken Salazar urging him to continue working to ease the regulatory restrictions that prevent more water from reaching Central Valley farms.

“With a 50% allocation, the Valley can begin to get on its feet again. But, it should not be lost on anyone that regulatory restrictions are still impeding our progress,” Costa wrote. **“I do not see any reason why agricultural service contractors on the Westside of the Valley should not be receiving upwards of 70% of contracted amounts by the final water supply allocation. We must do more...”**

In a statement released today, Costa reiterated the need to continue working toward a permanent solution to the Valley’s water woes:

“Every additional drop of water that we secure for the Valley puts people back to work and helps our farmers take advantage of the most productive agricultural land in the country. But, a 50% allocation is a clear indication that the system is broken, period. We need a permanent solution for Valley farmers. Progress has been made, and there is

much more to do.”

The text of the letter to Secretary Salazar is laid out below:

February 18, 2011

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

As you know, I have been working tirelessly with federal, state, and local water agencies along with my colleagues in Congress to bring real solutions to California’s ongoing water challenges. Every additional drop of water we have secured is a step forward in our continued efforts to provide a sustainable water supply to the region. I appreciate your commitment to partnering with me and the work that you and your staff put into finding ways within existing law to additional bring water to the San Joaquin Valley last year. This flexibility yielded real water that allowed farmers, farm workers, and farm communities in the Valley to receive more than a 45% water allocation last year while they rebounded from severe water supply shortages, regulatory cutbacks, and an economic recession.

With your help, we have made good progress, but we must do better. Last year, we broke ground on projects like the Delta Mendota Canal-California Aqueduct Intertie. We secured critical funding for drought relief and water supply enhancement projects throughout the Valley and the State. At our urging – in conjunction decisions by Judge Oliver Wanger in the courts and the National Academy of Sciences – your Department is now in the process of revising and integrating the two biological opinions that have had such significant impacts on our Valley’s water supply. And, on top of these and countless efforts that are still in the works, we are finally seeing some progress on the Bay Delta Conservation Plan that will determine the long-term viability of our water system.

While much has been done and more water is certainly flowing in the system, obstacles remain that could impede our progress. Today, the Bureau of Reclamation announced an initial 50% water supply allocation for agricultural service contractors in the Westside of the San Joaquin Valley. Although this is five times the amount that those same contractors received in 2009, hydrological conditions have improved dramatically since we were in the throes of the drought. Last December was one of the wettest months in recent history, and while this January was a dry month for the state, runoff and snowpack rates are continuing to approach and exceed numbers for an average water year for the Central Valley and State Water Projects. Furthermore, it is estimated that recent and coming winter storms will add even more water into the system.

Mr. Secretary, it may go without saying that a 50% initial water supply allocation comes as good news to many of my constituents who were in dire straits during this last drought, but it's not enough. Farmers can take this number to the bank, secure a loan, and rebuild their businesses when they were turned away before. Acres of fallowed agricultural lands can be cultivated, and farmers can grow the fresh vegetables, fruit, and fiber that feed our nation. With a 50% allocation, the Valley can begin to get on its feet again. But, it should not be lost on anyone that regulatory restrictions are still impeding our progress. In light of the hydrological conditions we have experienced this year, I do not see any reason why agricultural service contractors on the Westside of the Valley should not be receiving upwards of 70% of contracted amounts by the final water supply allocation. We must do more, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to find ways to increase the water flowing to farmers, farm workers, and farm communities on the Westside of the Valley.

With this in mind, I would also like to take this opportunity check in with you as to the status of numerous water projects in the attached list on which I have been working with your staff over the past two years to bring to fruition. Once completed, many of these projects would be able to boost our water supply. As such, they should continue to be expedited and given your personal consideration. At your earliest convenience, please forward an update to me of the projects on the attached list so that we can keep this process moving.

Once again, thank you for your attention to this and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

/s/

JIM COSTA
Member of Congress